



Which is master, mind or matter?

According to the Progress Publishers, Moscow, Dictionary of Philosophy, 1984 edition, the Fundamental Question of Philosophy is:

"...the question of the relationship of consciousness to being, of thought to matter and nature, examined on two planes, first, what is primary – spirit or nature, matter or consciousness – and second, how is knowledge of the world related to the world itself or, to put it differently, does consciousness correspond to being, is it capable of truthfully reflecting the world?"

According to the well-known series of articles by “Dialego” (John Hoffman) called “Philosophy and Class Struggle”: *“Materialism Vs. Idealism [is] the Basic Question of Philosophy”*. We will look at Dialego in more detail later in this series.

The Soviet dictionary proposes a unity-and-struggle-of-opposites as between human Subject and Objective nature. Dialego, on the other hand, proposes a dialectic between Materialism and Idealism.

So which is it? Which one of these two is correct?

Dialectical logic insists that its struggling opposites are interdependent. They define each other, and cannot escape each other, except through the working out of their struggle. In just this way, the Subject defines the Object, while at the same time the Object is the necessary condition for the Subject.

But Idealism and Materialism are two mutually-exclusive philosophical systems. They do not depend upon one another. If one prevails, the other one is annihilated. This is not dialectical. This is only a “zero-sum game”.

Says Dialego: *“...materialism contends that people's ideas, like all other aspects of their behaviour, are the product of material causes and can only be properly understood when these causes are discovered.”* This is also the position of other philosophies, such as Post-Modernism, and Social Darwinism, both of which

hold that human free will is an illusion.

Says the dictionary: *“The philosophers who form the camp of materialism regard matter, being, as being primary, and consciousness as secondary, and hold that consciousness is the result of influence exerted on it by the objectively existing external world.”*

This “materialist” view has been orthodoxy among many communists since the 1920s. Among others who expounded it, and who consequently promoted Dialectical Materialism were Joseph Stalin and [Maurice Cornforth](#) (1909 – 1980), a British theoretician. Among those with a different view have been the late [Cyril Smith](#), and Paolo Freire.

In this ten-part course we are going to test the question of Dialectical Materialism by interrogating the work of these and other thinkers.

The linked download, below, is relatively difficult to read. It is given for the sake of the first few of its pages, and to show that although Marx and Engels in their early writing did raise up the question of Idealism and Materialism, in a chapter title, yet it is by no means clear from this that they had any intentions to give birth to anything like Dialectical Materialism.

Although their work is saturated with philosophy, and particularly with Hegelian philosophy, yet the amount of writing that Marx and Engels did that was directly about philosophy was quite little. Much of it was in their early days

such as the period prior to the writing of the linked Part 1A of ["The German Ideology"](#), where they recall that:

"Principles ousted one another, heroes of the mind overthrew each other with unheard-of rapidity, and in the three years 1842-45 more of the past was swept away in Germany than at other times in three centuries."

The whole work was to be a *"Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets"*. These were the Young Hegelians, personally well known to the young Marx and Engels. The writing was polemical.

Does Marx support or advance in any way the reduction of all humanity and human history to non-human, molecular, chemical or nuclear sources? One view is that Marx is merely saying that the human Subject is only comprehensible within a material, Objective world. Or in other words, that the relationship of mind and matter is just that: a relationship. A dialectical relationship.

"The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals."

We will return to these questions.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Idealism and Materialism, 1845, Marx](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).